

# Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

## "Everybody, Look What's Going Down"

Standard:

- I. Culture
- II. Time, Continuity, and Change
- III. People, Places, and Environments
- IV. Individual Development and Identity
- V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- VIII. Science, Technology, and Society
- IX. Global Connections
- X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Grade Level:

9–12 (investigative research and simulation)

Objectives:

The student will:

- Investigate the events of the Tonkin Gulf incident
- Prepare and present a briefing on the truth they uncover
- Explain President Nixon's foreign policy change and peace plan for Vietnam
- Record their feelings about the controversies of this war and explain why they have those feelings

Time:

2 class periods

Materials:

Documents: **1964** *The Tonkin Gulf Incident*  
**1969** *The Nixon Doctrine*

Exercises: *A Confidential Transmission*

Access to internet in classroom or computer lab:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dv1hZIPT2mA> (Tonkin Gulf)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=5AaGVAipGp0> (Fog of War excerpt #1: McNamara's admission)

Procedures:

### *Setting the Stage*

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson received a report of an attack by North Vietnamese gunboats on U.S. Navy destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin, off the Vietnamese coast. Johnson went on TV to inform the public and then went to Congress to ask permission to use all necessary measures to stop the aggression. He also ordered attacks on the North Vietnamese.

--Continued--

*Setting the Stage--Continued*

Using this power, Johnson committed more troops to the cause and escalated the conflict into full-scale war. During the mid-1960s, the war became controversial and divisive. The Vietnam war was one of the major factors behind Johnson's surprise decision not to run for a second term in 1968.

His successor, Richard M. Nixon, pledged to end the war, but found it difficult to end American involvement in the Vietnamese "quagmire" without seeming to abandon its allies. Nixon came up with a new approach in the Nixon Doctrine called "Vietnamization," a program to train and replace American troops with Vietnamese, who would then be able to wage their own war.

Questions about what, if anything, happened in the Gulf of Tonkin persisted. During the 1970s, Americans learned through the release of the secret "Pentagon Papers," that the Tonkin Gulf incident was not what it had seemed to be. In the film, *Fog of War*, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said that it never happened.

*Pre-Lesson*

- 1.** Download the videos of President Johnson announcing the Tonkin Gulf Incident and of former Secretary of Defence McNamara saying it did not happen. Prepare for projection. (Check the school's media collection; it is possible there will be a video that also could be used.)
- 2.** Find a copy of *Fog of War*, a film about McNamara's work as Secretary of Defense. (Available at Amazon or other retail outlets.)
- 3.** Download the song "For What Its Worth" by Buffalo Springfield (1966) to be played during the lesson.

*Day One*

- 1.** As students arrive, project Lyndon Johnson's Tonkin Gulf speech; have them notice the music in the background.
- 2.** Distribute the document, *The Tonkin Gulf Incident*, for them to follow along. (The video does not include the entire speech.)
- 3.** Now show the video of McNamara saying it did not occur.
- 4.** Hand out the exercise, *A Confidential Transmission* (simulated—not real) and tell students based on the events in the Gulf of Tonkin and the President's remarks, the Secretary of Defense wants an official report.
- 5.** Students should be divided into teams of four, pretending that they are the commanders (Sharp, Jackson, Herrick, and Ogiera) directed to write the report.
- 6.** Students will need Internet access to go to the Naval History web site, <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-m/dd731-k.htm>, to help prepare the report and see actual paths of the naval vessels.

- 7.** As they work on their official reports, play the song “For What Its Worth” by Buffalo Springfield.
- 8.** As they finish their reports, tell them the Secretary of Defense wants a briefing in the morning. Each group should be ready. They can prepare posters, if they choose, with pictures.

*Day Two*

- 1.** Begin with each group presenting its briefing on the event. Is there any conflicting information? Discuss it so that the “commanders” can adjust their reports before sending them to Secretary McNamara.
- 2.** As they finalize their official investigative reports, distribute the *Nixon Doctrine* document.
- 3.** Ask students to read and take notes for three purposes:
  - a.** President Nixon’s version of the history of the Vietnam conflict
  - b.** Nixon’s peace proposals
  - c.** Nixon’s Vietnamization plan
- 4.** While they read, circulate and collect the investigative reports—giving advice, if needed, for final report to be perfect.
- 5.** When the class has finished the reading, discuss the three categories listed above.
- 6.** After the discussion, ask them to take their “confidential transmission” sheets, draw a circle on the back, and divide it into quadrants (four).
  - a.** In each quadrant, students should list two (2) feelings they have about the government’s role in the Tonkin Gulf incident in view of these documents and events.
  - b.** Have them choose one quadrant and explain why they have the two feelings they put in that quadrant.
  - c.** Underneath their circle ask them if they think the American public shared these feelings in 1964-68? Or did they feel something worse? Why?
- 7.** Collect their circles.

Extension Activities:

- 1.** Show the entire film, *The Fog of War*.
- 2.** Select topics for students to investigate further:
  - Pentagon Papers
  - Paris Peace Talks
  - Evacuation of Vietnam
  - Songs of protest related to Vietnam ■